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Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkonnet.wordpress.com>

Attack! 99 The ERO visit and the water play

(Based on a real incident)

They're here. What a sight!

Get a grip!

Eye of the beholder?

But just too much power.

And the inhibiting game of second-guessing what the review office wants.

Why does it have to be like this? (Feeling sorry for myself.)

Why can't we agree on the main aims of what we do, as in the curriculum document, and then be visited by people interested in the various ways schools move towards those aims?

Why this obsessive call for data?

We all know national standards are hurting children, inhibiting teachers.

It's screwing New Zealand education.

We could just as well just post it in and they post back whether there was enough or not.

At most they spend ten minutes in a classroom.

(To be famous last words.)

They are saving the children (to their mind) by destroying their learning (to mine).

Something sinister?

Is it to set up the grounds for saying – what's the use of giving more money to schools as teachers are not up to the job?

She looked out the large window to the right of the outside door; saw the cloud clearing from the blackish-green of the distant ranges, the sun coming through.

What a promising day to waste being on edge.

About a dozen of the children were already inside. She liked that – their murmuring application to some self-appointed task.

She let it run after the buzzer to allow the day start with a nice flow.

By now all the children in the new entrant room were involved in some activity.

A number of them are with their 'I can read' books, most sprawled on the cushions; others are in the dress-up area; a number are completing writing and artwork from the day before. All the children are involved. A parent-help is going around the children while I take the fortnightly running records.

I start to read a story about a taniwha, most of the children drift over. Even the three who don't are listening while they stay with their artwork.

As I read I leave silences, which are followed by surges of responses by the children. A rhythm develops between the reading and the class.

The children mime certain parts and then, in role, are asked questions by the children.

The children, as is usual, can choose whether to go outside for water play first, or write about the taniwha or a topic of their own choice, with their turn at water play after. Artwork and writing (also drama) go together with children allowed to do one before the other. (A lot of this work is continued and completed in their own time, especially before the bells and after.)

Play is an important part of my classroom, providing children with a lot of opportunities to learn, imagine, create, experiment, relate, problem solve, and a wide range of other competencies. I have found water play a winner right through the contributing school years, but for new entrants and juniors a necessity in meeting class aims.

Two raised troughs and one large bath are available to the children. The equipment I put out is suggestive of what children might do rather than directive. There can be plastic, wood, or metal items; cups, spoons, bottles, colanders, sieves, funnels, and lots of tubes; sponges, waterwheels, and watering cans; squeeze bottles; shells, stones, seaweed, and driftwood; cardboard and blu-tack; soap or detergent.

The learning from the regular water play is continuous in experience: when the children come back from water play, what is discussed one day contributes to the experience the next and so on. It also contributes to their writing.

Recently, I have been concentrating on problem-solving abilities and useful maths vocabulary such as more/less, same/different, many/few, empty/full, before/after, greater than/less than, and counting.

So there we were: the water play group on the verge of putting on their hats to go outside and the writing group ready to do writing though some had chosen to do artwork first.

The children were now moving to their areas: the water play group down the outside steps; the writing (and art group) to the writing or art area.

There was a knock and there was the 'birdie' one at the door. As she was introducing herself she suddenly became more interested in peering over my shoulder.

'Where are the children going?'

'Out to do water play.'

'Water play?'

'Yes, water play.'

'They play with water,' I added.

She could sense an attitude.

'And what is the other group doing?'

'Writing.'

'But some aren't.'

'No, some are doing artwork.'

'Artwork instead of writing?'

'No – artwork with writing.'

She was vexed.

Abruptly she left me to go outside.

Standing a couple of careful paces back from the children she stared. No attempt was made to relate to them.

They were connecting tubes, some of which went upward in a crazy structure that fed into containers by pressure from plastic bottles.

She abruptly turned left and walked swiftly past the room and out of sight.

Not long to wait. All three were at the door. Perfunctory introductions and they brushed past me, first to see the writers (and artists), and then outside to see the water play.

They had the look of something they were still looking for.

There was more going on here than teaching and learning, this was about putting a teacher down, about instilling the right attitude to authority. All teachers know about this.

They went into a huddle in full view outside my classroom window.

Then before I could move they had me surrounded.

The man was disturbingly close.

'We are concerned with your programme.'

'Why in writing time are children doing artwork?'

I was not going to be bullied.

I was provocatively allusive.

'They are both forms of expression and communication and belong together.'

'Children must be able to write to pass exams.'

'It's a national standard,' he added.

'This is a choice programme and the children have the choice to do writing and art on a topic of their choice or one I suggest, and whether to do the writing first or the artwork.'

'Why complicate it when writing is a national standard?'

'One helps the other.'

But this was not really what they were about.

They hated the water play.

I explained its purposes and how it tied into the competencies. They were having none of it.

'When do they do their writing?' was the question asked almost exultantly.

'At the change over.'

Then to retrieve: 'Where is the data for this water play?'

'I make evaluative comments in relation to the competencies.'

'No - we want figures, real data,' the other woman said.

'Hard data.'

We'll come back later.

They never did.

No need to.

